

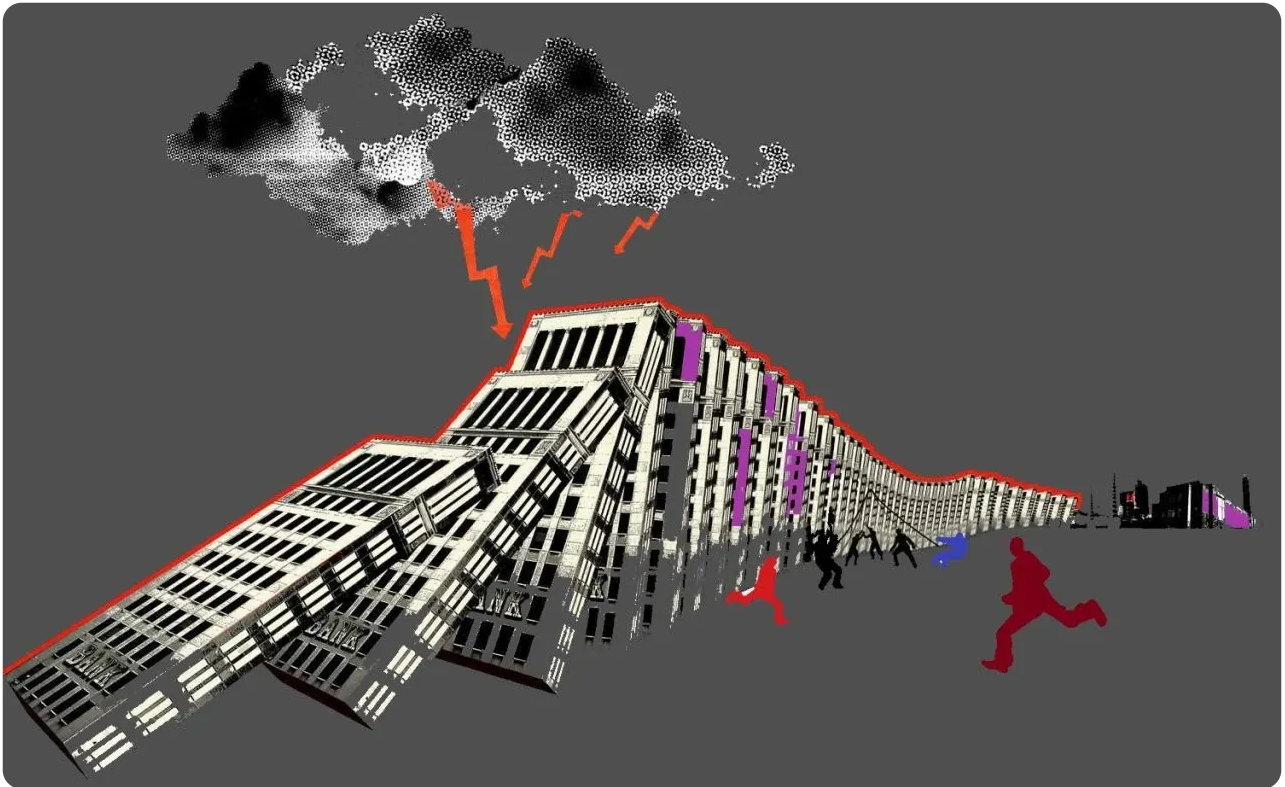
Voter Tolerance of Institutional Erosion: Causal Evidence on Democratic Theory and Open Democracy in the United States

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Abstract

This article examines why voters may express support for democracy while continuing to support candidates who weaken institutional openness, minority rights, or political contestability. It describes how polarization, party loyalty, policy preferences, elite signals, and perceptions of existential threat may reduce electoral punishment for democratic violations. The article mentions open–democracy theory as extending democratic evaluation beyond competitive elections to include inclusive deliberation, agenda access, citizen assemblies, participation, and continuing public influence over decision-making. It also discusses the risks of tokenism, agenda manipulation, biased expert selection, and participatory forums without meaningful authority. Survey experiments can test whether exposure to balanced evidence, cross-partisan discussion, or direct deliberation changes voter tolerance of attacks on democratic institutions. The article concludes that participatory innovation strengthens democratic accountability only when selection is transparent, evidence is plural, authority is clearly defined, officials must respond, and citizens can observe whether their involvement produces institutional or policy change.



The voters can support principle of “Democracy” but can vote for the candidate who provides less opportunities to “Power”. In September 2025, open-democracy theory enriches causal analysis of institutional erosion with questions regarding more than just the competitiveness of elections; it also asks whether citizens stand up for the inclusion of others, deliberative practices, and contestability. Partisan bargains can lead to a lessening of enforcement for referee attacks, opponents’ attacks and violations of minority rights. By the same time, democratic innovations can widen up public decisions’ ownership. The big question here is not whether it is more broadly participatory, which is more at issue on the side of Leonie Brinkema and David Rieser perhaps, but whether it’s an authentic thicker kind of resistance as opposed to some other symbolic layer without any teeth.

There is a tendency towards abstract support of democracy when an elective choice exists which can be separated from partisan considerations. Svoboda came up with polarization theory, according to which those who do not like it is possible to rationalize the undemocratic behaviors of a side that they prefer, in particular if the political conflict is perceived as an existential threat. In the United States and elsewhere, candidate-choice experiments also reveal that partisan and policy attachments also mitigate the level of punishment for abuses of democracy. This does not imply apathetic attitude on the whole part.

They demonstrate the importance of competition, information, ‘elite cues’ and credible

alternatives in accountability. The best option is to ask and assess if the citizens reject a favorite candidate in the event of a certain violation, rather than approving of democracy in an overall survey question.

With view to support the existence of open-democracy theory it is necessary to pay attention to the continuous accessibility of power, differently from the old focus on periodic authorization. Hélène Landemore's research specializes on openness, inclusive deliberation and other avenues for non-electoral participation for ordinary citizens. One institutional way is sortition and citizens' assemblies, but by selecting alone, we cannot be sure there is equality. Practical influence is on the basis of agenda control, expert support, compensation, approaches and public response.

The cognitive diversity and decreasing the monopoly of a profession are possible ways open institutions can complement elections. All the constitutional rights, good administration and a relationship between citizens bodies and authoritative and binding public power remain as conditions for success.

Democratic innovations can go wrong via tokenism, capture or isolation. With an assembly picked at random, deliberation can be performed in a thoughtful manner while elected institutions need to hear none of the recommendations. Digital participation can increase accessibility, but can also provide a platform that reinforces organised groups and disfavours even well-meaning individuals who are not well connected, who lack language access, have limited time or who do not trust the platform. Hence, there is a need for an institutional mechanism for citizens to influence outcomes that involves them in decision, review and implementation processes.

Proposals submitted to the public authorities should be accepted, modified or rejected and the reasons for it should be explained. Representativeness, learning, agenda influence, policy change, and longer-term trust should be measured not participation or more positive participant surveys.

Using, or being used by, a wheelchair does not equate with power. Voice expansion can occur—through consultations and hearings, through online digital portals, through citizen panels, through advisory boards—but none of these mechanisms involve a change in the process of agenda setting, information control or ultimate decisionmaking.

Questions to pose to the evaluation should include such questions as: Who gets into the room, who gets a platform, who gets to be heard, which recommendations to policy are made, and do excluded groups have an avenue for appeal? Participation may come across as symbolic when it involves the participation of selected appropriate participants or is

undertaken to provide a comment following core decisions. A well-designed process provides the participants with information in time, independent facilitation, clear communication about the issues and appropriate responsibility about how to choose, and a clear link between deliberation and the final decisions.

Often times, instead of ever actually repressing the masses, authoritarian politics is carried out by dealing with coalitions. Leaders of these institutions gingerly loosen rules, incentivize them to maintain loyalty, carve out divisions among opponents, and leave sufficient space for elections in order to secure a measure of legitimacy. Democratic backsliding can thus manifest itself in legal appointments, procedure change, selective enforcement of law or pressure exerted on information institutions. Voters are bounced around with mixed messages; each move can be described as good old politics.

The cumulative advantage and the institutional asymmetry are the key issues to be analyzed. Finally, will the key issue be whether they are in a position as 'governing actors' to break the rules, manipulate referees, or even ostracise critics for less cost than one's opponents?

Institutional constraints operate via means of independence, capacity, transparency and coordination. A court that is actually independent, but has no timely access or its remedies cannot be enforced provides weak protection. Loans to have no stability, a professional civil service still is subject to loyalty tests. Election officials require resources, physical security, protection and confidence in the law, and public accountability.

It is important for media freedom to have access to information and protection against retaliatory research. Constraints are made durable if multiple institutions are able to detect, expose, delay and fix abuse. Redundancy also lessens the chance when one body is confiscated, the whole accountability system may be shut down.

Democracy measurement translates even the most sophisticated institutions into their constituent parts, but each index involves a series of choices not just about the concept simultaneously, but also about evidence, aggregation and uncertainty. Electoral competition, civil liberties, judicial independence, media freedom, participation, equality and deliberation show various aspects. V-Dem accounts for this complexity by means of several indices and expert-coded indicators and other projects do the same by means of different frameworks. While scores enable people to compare, a national average could mask disparities that are found by region, citizenship, or quick administration shift. Therefore, it is important in Responsible use to look at indicator-level movement and confidence intervals as well as making coding notes and using corroborating evidence

rather than relying on a single rank as a diagnosis.

The fundamental rights are still relatively strong as they are protected despite uncertainty, fear and political asymmetry. Most challenging instances are when it comes to unpopular communities, controversial speech, migrants, prisoners, protesters or communities labeled as security threats. Equal protection in calm times provides some evidence on the strength of the constitution. Resilience is manifested in due process, in the assessment of individual cases, in legal representation, review and reasoned arguments being maintained in a pressure situation.

Spatial effects are very important to consider, as is the effect of the rule on people with disabilities, the language they speak, and their income; also migration status, but also effects through access to digital systems; a formally neutral rule can generate concentrated effects on the distribution. So that rights are protected, therefore, both doctrinal and implementation attentions have to be paid.

Increased representation via random selection as citizens, instead of selection via party, wealth, or profession. Adoption of stratification can help to provide demographic balance and compensation and support can help to remove barriers to participation. There is a need for a public mandate, transparency over the selection, conflict rules, and action on the part of elected institutions. Random selection is no guarantee against a bias in the process of agenda, expert selection or facilitation.

To this end a Citizen Assembly must have independent governance and be subject to public oversight. The ability to discover judgment means that democratic value is realized by giving access to the discovery of the judgment without at the same time giving up the responsibility to make decisions and implement them.

Deliberation means there should be infrastructure for this deliberation and not just a single public meeting. They require a well-rounded support to the evidence, sufficient time, a good facilitator, accessibility, protection from harassment, and an explanation of authority. Without imposing consensus, minority reports can help to maintain disagreement. Public observation and documentation increases legitimacy, and private discussion, while providing an opportunity to be candid, can be seen as building on transparency of safeguards.

One should look at learning, respect, agenda influence, as well as policy response and evaluate them. But democratic innovation only really comes to life when both the design of institutions supports informed judgment, as well as when the judgment is linked with a

decision process that is able to take action.

Experimental research can help determine if voter participation affects voter tolerance of violations of democracy. The institutional trade-offs citizens face can be compared with conventional information treatments if they have been exposed to balanced deliberation, cross-partisan discussion, or direct experience with these sorts of trade-offs. These should include candidates' choice, candidate sanctions of co-partisans and minority rights, as well as acceptance of electoral defeat.

But there are also new risks and opportunities for manipulation associated with open democracy. The organised actors can drive the agenda, experts can narrow the options and officials can pass on unpopular decisions on to citizens. A transparent selection and facilitation process must be followed; evidence must be plural and authority must be clear. Participation is effective in building democratic constraint if it is not "capturable" by design.

Democracy is an open form of government that doesn't have an automatic remedy for institutional corrosion. A system of citizen assemblies, consultations and participatory systems need authority and information, inclusion and visibility of decisions made by decision makers. Openness can increase democratic ownership, reveal early closing, and is coupled with elections, rights and courts and professional administration. Active citizenship to participate in public reasoning on issues, to challenge implementation and to see decision change makes recovery durable.

Power remains democratic if it is access that is not restricted and opposition remains legitimate and not blocked off by a temporary majority. An open agenda and access to evidence, deliberation, reasons and implementation review is required. Non-participation, or participation without response, can aggravate the cynicism and not democratic trust. There is a need for citizen bodies to have authority commensurate with their functions.

It is important to loop both Electoral institutions and participatory institutions, it does not mean one should supplant the other. On the one hand, Openness means access to: Agendas, Evidence, Deliberation, Reasons, and review of implementation.